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ABSTRACT

Too often, vocational education in prisons has not been given the necessary political, financial, or administrative support necessary for it to be truly effective. Besides being faced with the problems of inadequate funding and generally inadequate facilities, equipment, and instructor training, prison-based vocational education programs often lack adequate program standards and are not relevant to inmates' job training needs. In areas such as research, evaluation, data collection, and general leadership, corrections-based vocational education functions in a virtual vacuum. Despite these problems, policymakers and the general public are beginning to become aware of the economic and rehabilitative benefits of such programs. Policymakers interested in improving prison-based vocational education in the future should provide funding to improve and increase research and evaluation, develop more community involvement and interagency cooperation at all levels, and foster leadership from professional organizations and Federal and State agencies. (MN)

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THE NEGLECTED ENTERPRISE: VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN AMERICA'S PRISONS

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A LARGE-SCALE ENTERPRISE

An aspect of the American vocational education enterprise too often neglected is vocational education offered within the country's prison system. Yet the education component of our corrections system is a large-scale endeavor. In fact, corrections education constitutes the third largest public education sector in the United States, according to Whitehead (1), behind schools and colleges, and the Department of Labor. The National Advisory Council on Vocational Education (2) reports that nearly one-half million adults are incarcerated in the nation's 912 state correctional facilities, 4,000 local jails and 49 federal institutions and centers. Many of these prisoners enroll in some type of educational offering, which may include not only vocational education but also general adult education, non-technical postsecondary education and other types of instruction. Of these categories, vocational education has the longest tradition and what many consider the most potential for postive results, but unfortunately it has not been given the necessary political, financial or administrative support necessary for a truly effective system.

DEFINITIONS AND HISTORY

For the purposes of this paper, vocational education in corrections follows the definition developed by the National Advisory Council on Vocational Education and reported by Day and McCane (3):

> Vocational education in corrections can be broadly defined as instruction offered within correctional systems to enable offenders to be employment ready upon their return to free society. It involves the development of basic skills, specific occupational training, and an array of job readiness training, including the development of motivation, good work habits and survival skills.

The same authors identify two basic types of vocational programs for incarcerated offenders, which enroll approximately 25,000 adults and 7,000 juveniles in over 140 subject areas (3). These include institutionally based programs (by far the largest category) and community based programs, which often draw on the resources of community colleges and vocational schools through work-release programs.

The idea of providing vocational education to incarcerated Americans is not new. As early as 1865, correctional facilities such as the Weeks School in Vermont offered vocational training as a means of rehabilitating persons convicted of criminal acts (4). This was followed by what is generally considered the first truly reformatory prison in America, the Elmira Reformatory in Elmira, New York. Built in 1876, the facility not only housed inmates but also taught them from among thirty-six different trades including, according to Allen and Simonsen (5), mechanical and freehand

drawing, wood and metal-working, cardboard construction form work, cabinet making and iron molding.

Vocational education grew in prison settings in subsequent decades, but faced something of a setback in the 1930's when federal legislation restricted the transportation of goods manufactured in prison. This lack of emphasis prevailed until the 1960's, when renewed interest in vocational education surfaced.

As with vocational education as a whole, the role of vocational education in prisons has been heavily influenced by the federal government. In 1964, the U.S. Department of Labor began funding experimental prison training programs, the first being implemented at the Draper Institution near Montgomery, Alabama. The experiments were judged a success, particularly in reducing recidivism following release; in one case the rate of repeat offenders was reduced from 70 percent to 30 percent, according to Goldfarb and Singer (6). Vocational subjects taught in these programs included auto mechanics, barbering, masonry, welding and sign painting.

With a 1965 amendment to the Manpower and Training Act, the federal government officially designated prison training as a priority area:

> The Secretary of Labor shall...develop and carry out experimental and demonstration programs of training and education for persons in correctional institutions who are in need thereof to obtain employment upon release. Programs...may include vocational education; special job development and

placement activities; pre-vocational, basic and secondary education, and couseling; supportive and follow-up services and other such activities as deemed necessary (6).

MAJOR PROBLEMS IN CORRECTIONS-BASED VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Despite government efforts to foster the development of vocational education for offenders, a number of serious problems limit correctional institutions' capabilities for delivering vocational education effectively. While a few meritorious prison programs might be singled out as laudable, corrections education as a whole is riddled with deficiencies.

Hearings conducted by the National Advisory Council on Vocational Education in 1979 revealed four major issues detracting from effective vocational offerings in prison settings:

1) inadequate funding
2) generally inadequate facilities, equipment, instructor training and administrative support
3) lack of program standards and relevance of training to job needs, and
4) a vacuum in such areas as research, evaluation, data collection and general leadership (2).

One of the most serious problems is that the prison setting often is

simply not conducive to the educational process. Franklin points out that physical facilities are often poor, libraries deficient, schedules erratic, and guards uncooperative or even hostile (7). Goldin and Thomas (9) cited an incidence in which classroom temperatures exceeded 110 degrees. Anderson records that problems in attendance and program non-completion are pervasive and complicated due to such factors as paroles, discharges, medical transfers, prison unit transfers, bench warrants and job assignments (8). In many cases the quality of instruction is questionable, with a too frequent pattern of using what Whitehead refers to as "political hacks, educational cast-offs, and retirees who really retired" (1). Fiscal constraints also pose significant barriers to instructional delivery as well as to curriculum improvement (8).

Another concern is that areas in which prison training is provided are too often those with a low demand in the job market. Miller (10) cites a Department of Labor study indicating that "the occupational categories involving the greatest number of inmates in training were generally those that were the least successful in terms of permanent employment potential." Whitehead (1) decries the fact that prison-based programs are still training inmates to be dishwashers, garbage collectors, farmhands, coal miners and sign painters.

TRENDS AND CONCLUSIONS

Despite the many problems associated with delivering vocational education to inmates, the value of such educational programs is becoming

increasingly widely recognized, as Theodore Shannon points out:

> There is, at long last, growing accord concerning the utility of education, vocational education in particular, as an effective form of intervention during the incarceration period. While no one would presume to suggest that vocational education for inmates is a cure-all, it certainly demonstrates viability as a change agent (11).

The economic factor is one of the strongest arguments in favor of corrections-based vocational education. Without training which can lead to a successful job following incarceration, ex-offenders and their families are more likely to become dependent on public assistance or end up back in prison, where it will cost as much as $30,000 to $50,000 annually to maintain each inmate, according to Franklin (7).

The postive impact of vocational education on ex-offenders has been amply demonstrated. Glaser (12) cites several studies which have shown a much lower rate of parole violations and recidivism for those who had received vocational training while incarcerated.

In looking to the future, there is little doubt that prison-based vocational education will continue to be a major enterprise. Within this context, the following projections might well be made based on current programs and trends:

1) The demand for vocational education in American prisons will continue to grow. America, as Franklin notes, incarcerates a higher percentage of its population than any other country, and arrest rates more than tripled between 1966 and 1977 (7). At the same time, Shannon estimates that only 5 percent of the national incarcerated population currently receive vocational training, while as much as 50 percent could probably benefit from vocational education (11).

2) Improvements will be slow in coming for prison-based vocational programs. Although some prisons have developed effective educational programs, many have lagged behind; and major problems in quality and effectiveness of instructional programming will continue to provide difficult challenges to educators and corrections officials. Prisons have always been slow to change compared to many other public institutions, and this will likely remain the case even as rapid technological change makes it difficult for vocational and technical programs at all levels to remain up-to-date. At the same time, fiscal constraints will make it difficult to implement improvement in staffing, equipment and program development.

3) The role of educational institutions working in cooperation with prisons will continue to be important. Community, junior and technical colleges, which helped invigorate prison education programs in the 1960's and 1970's, will continue to play an important role in providing vocational education to inmates.

4) Educators in prison settings will continue to be challanged by the lack of basic skills evidenced by large numbers of students. Advances in instructional technology, such as computer assisted instruction, may help in addressing this problem area.

SUMMARY

Considering the various factors involved, the following recommendations by Day and McCane seem a reasonable approach toward future improvement for vocational education in corrections:

1) Improve and increase research and evaluation

2) Develop more community involvement and inter-agency cooperation at all levels, and

3) Foster leadership from professional organizations,

federal and state agencies (3).

As Shannon points out, vocational education for offenders is to be greatly preferred over other alternatives:

> Inmates are supported by taxpayer's money. When they leave prison, they can return to illegal activities if there is nothing else for them to do, or they can be armed with the requisite affective, cognitive and psychomotor skills necessary to land a satisfying job. With recidivism the ultimate alternative in many cases, vocational education seems like a sensible, cost effective risk (11).

In the years ahead, it will be incumbent on vocational educators, corrections administrators, government officials and concerned citizens to work together in seeing that an effective system of vocational education is maintained within our correctional institutions.

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